



## *A Tribute to New Orleans*

### Memories of the city that was, will it ever be again?

As a horrified world watched the scenes of devastation left in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, many that had the good fortune to be visitors to this great city mourned the loss of culture and a beautifully preserved living history that this regal city had embodied. Not only residents of New Orleans, but the hundreds of thousands that visited it over the years and had walked the streets of the French Quarter, looked for ghosts amongst the city's stately old mansions, and enjoyed the ever-present resonance of jazz, the heartbeat of this great city, are heartbroken at the destruction.

New Orleans was a city that preserved its origins and cultural influences in its fine restaurants, music halls, elegant homes and picturesque avenues. Hundreds of years of history were on view as one strolled the byways, and the absolute unique character of this city left a lasting impression on all that came to vacation there. Some of them have been kind enough to share their reminiscences and fond memories of the wonderful times they enjoyed in New Orleans.

From Margaret, a frequent visitor: "New Orleans is my favorite US city to visit and I've spent a lot of time there over the years. I just love the steamy place in the summer. The sidewalks still radiate heat at 10:00 pm. We complain, but it is part of its character. First place I always hit is the Café du Monde for beignets and cafe au lait. When you finish eating them, you're covered in powdered sugar. The Café is located at the edge of Jackson Square in the French Quarter. The Quarter is filled with antique stores that are a wonder to browse. There is a voodoo store in the Quarter with lots of potions (fun to read how to use them!) and voodoo dolls. I have a couple of those and stick pins in them occasionally. The restaurants are like no others in the world. The combination of Creole cooking is outstanding. Every night while visiting, one stop always on my list is Preservation Hall down in the Quarter. It is a very dilapidated building, packed shoulder to shoulder with people listening to the old-timers in the jazz business. The sounds are sublime. I am heartbroken that this city has suffered this catastrophe."

Moreover, this from our friend Diane: "Some years ago, another couple, my husband, and I had the good fortune of visiting New Orleans for their JazzFest. We were mesmerized by New Orleans! First, you CANNOT get a BAD meal in New Orleans. Every bit of food we ate there was delicious! We loved dining outside on the balcony, and people watching as we ate. In addition, there is music everywhere in New Orleans. It cannot be escaped, and it is wonderful.

New Orleans has a charm and a graciousness all its own. It's historic, it's creepy (many ghost stories there -- we took a "Ghost Walk" one evening), it's amazing. God bless New Orleans. May she rise again!"

The many tender memories don't end there, here are the thoughts of Jacquelin: "I visited New Orleans for the very first time in early spring, 2004. In all my years of life, I had never heard Jazz like I heard in the French Quarter. There was live jazz coming from each of the wonderful eatery/bars. Never before could I walk down a sidewalk, browse in the antique stores and listen to the most wonderful live jazz bands I have ever heard coming from each establishment while we walked along. It saddens me that this old city is going through the devastation I am watching on TV. She, New Orleans, was a grand old dame and I believe she will be restored and the live Jazz Bands will once again be heard."

"I visited New Orleans just once, with a friend, about 25 years ago, and I am now so glad that I did. There is so much history there, such charm, yes, a bit run down, but also, so very elegant. There is simply no other city in the USA that is anything like New Orleans. Strolling down Bourbon St in the steamy sun, sipping a beverage, trying to decide (so difficult) where to eat next; watching the youngsters do blazing street tap dancing for tips. Jazz, America's only original art form, started here, and it is played here like no place else. Watching the old timers blowing Dixieland at Preservation Hall... Every city has a personality, and no city has more personality than New Orleans" Thank you for that evocative memory, Joe B.

"My husband and I went to Mardi Gras one year. Imagine the colors and costumes of Carnival in Rio, that is some of Mardi Gras. The parade is filled with floats representing "Krewes" ..Krewe of Pontchartrain, Krewe of Ceasar, Krewe of Atlas, Krewe of Eve, and so many more. There are float competitions so each one tries to outdo the other. The essential thing though is BEADS! You flash for beads, dance, shake for beads. A night of partying, King Cakes and full on celebration before the holy time of Lent." Like Patty, from Florida, with her special memory of Mardi Gras, all harbor the hope that "This town will come back." Everyone has their special place that touched their soul, a secret ally or cul-de-sac that they may have come upon by accident, but delighted them with latticed balconies, small squares fill with statues, or charming

streets lined with moss covered trees, their trunks thick with age. Masses of vacationers flocked to New Orleans not only for the famous events, but to experience the vibrant living history that reverberated from every avenue.

As the world watched in dismay, Katarina destroyed this history in a matter of hours; some describe it with the “fury of a nuclear blast.” The loss of life and the terrible events that surround this catastrophe fill the headlines, the ramifications to be felt for decades to come. Will New Orleans ever regain her glory? A report from the Louisiana State University based on data from the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers proposes that because of its geographical location New Orleans would most likely have been underwater by the end of this century due to erosion of the wetlands. The founding fathers may have chosen this spot 300 years ago because of the convenience of the port for international and national trade, having access to the Gulf of Mexico and then to the Mississippi, but they could not foresee the dangers the very foundations of the city would face, even without the effects of Katrina. In addition, the question is, if rebuilt, would it ever be quite the same? The years of tradition would likely be replaced by the new; anything remotely resembling what was would be an imitation, and then possibly subject to the imagination of promoters looking to create a tourist product. Sadly, it is very possible that the uniquely authentic ambiance of New Orleans is lost forever, for such a thing is elusive and intangible, and cannot be constructed, as if it was a theme park. The city may be rebuilt, and though it may not be the New Orleans of old, which will truly be a great loss, it will still live on in the hearts and memories of the multitudes that were fortunate to enjoy the city in her days of glory.

We wish to express a special thanks to the web log site of Pundit Sobek, who has graciously given permission to use his pictures from his days living in New Orleans. More photos and his personal recollections of this great city can be found at <http://sobekpundit.blogspot.com/2005/08/elegy.html>.

**It is well worth a look.**